



Figure 1: 5-on-4 ice.

Figure 2: 4-on-3 roller.

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## Improving your penalty killing skills

By Greg Siller

The objective of any penalty killing unit is to play the percentages and stop the opposing team from scoring. A team does this by using quickness, discipline, and an overall penalty killing strategy. The coach must ensure that the penalty killing unit understands and executes the following three penalty killing fundamentals:

### **1. Control the area around the slot**

There are at least two ways of doing this. The first way is to physically position a penalty killing player in the slot to control that area, thus preventing attackers from screening your goaltender, deflecting a puck into the net, or receiving a pass or a rebound.

The second, and probably more effective way, is to position the penalty killing players around the perimeter of the slot to control that area using a box or triangular formation (see Figures 1 and 2). The penalty killing team plays a series of two-on-ones between the puck carrier and the supporting players, attempting to break up a pass and gain control of the puck. If a pass does get to the slot, one defender should immediately converge on the attacker to gain control of the puck and prevent any rebounds.

### **2. Coordinate with your goaltender**

Involve your goaltender in each penalty killing situation as this neutralizes some of the manpower disadvantage. Communication between the penalty killing unit and the goaltender is essential so there is no confusion about loose pucks or possible rebounds.

### **3. Work the clock**

When playing a running time game, get as many faceoffs as you can. You'll tick off five-to-10 seconds for every draw. Whenever possible, make player changes during the stoppages in play. You can slow down the pace of the opposition power play and rest your best penalty killers. Although the referee may object to too many player changes, take advantage of at least one or two per penalty.

### **One player short**

The most efficient way to play this situation is by using a box (5-on-4 ice) or triangular (4-on-3 roller) formation (the circled players shown in Figures 1 and 2), where two penalty killers play low to cover the deep attackers and the remaining penalty killer(s) plays high to cover the opponent's point men.

When the attacker XLD has control of the puck high in the offensive zone, LD and RD play the pass between the deep attackers while LF and RF play the pass between the remaining attackers.

If the puck is moved behind the net, do not go behind the net because the majority of time you will lose that race! When the puck is moved behind the net, play the percentages and force the puck carrier to make the first move. Generally, in this situation, one of the attacking defensemen will move in toward the slot for a shot. LF should constantly read the positioning of the attacking point men as well as the puck carrier behind the net. He should move to the slot along with either defenseman and communicate with his teammates along the way.

When you gain control of the puck, freeze it, skate with it, or shoot it down the playing surface. Either way, you will knock precious time off the clock.

### **Two players short**

The objective in this situation is to let your goaltender play the shooter while the penalty killers make sure that passes across the slot and rebounds are covered. Do your best to give the netminder a clear view of the

incoming puck. Again, get as many stoppages of play as possible to try and eat away at the clock. If you come away without a goal being scored on you, you've done a fine job.

Give your players plenty of practice in penalty killing situations so that they can *experience* the best tactics to use. Hockey is not a very forgiving sport for penalty killing teams that do not practice. I

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